

WHITE HONEY AND BEESWAX: TWO ALTERNATIVES TO SAVE THE MOUNT OKU FOREST

Economy and business serving biodiversity

Mount Kilum Ijim is home to the largest West African mountain rainforest. Unfortunately, bush fires that destroy unique ecosystems regularly cross it.

CAMEROON



With the variety of melliferous plants that it shelters, this unique forest allows for producing high quality honey.

The development of beekeeping can reverse the trend of destruction and reduce the threats to biodiversity by creating new sources of income for local communities.

The site and its biodiversity

The 18 community forests of Mount Kilum Ijim cover an area of 20,000 hectares that surround a beautiful crater lake located at an altitude of 3,011 m in northwest Cameroon. They are home to endemic species such as the Bannerman's Turaco and *Bamenda Batis*, two bird species particularly threatened by habitat loss.

Flora that has developed in this high altitude area is particularly varied. It has many species such as *Prunus africana* and *Pittosporum veridiflorum* whose products are highly sought after by the pharmaceutical industry. The existing combination of melliferous and medicinal species allows for producing a special kind of honey, the Oku white honey.

Several hundred traditional hives are present in the forests and contribute to enhancing the value of this exceptional biodiversity.

Major issues

The area around Mount Kilim Ijum is one of the most densely populated in Cameroon: 300,000 people live within less than one walking day from these forests that are vulnerable to many threats such as the extensive agricultural and animal-farming development, deforestation and bush fires that endanger the ecological balance.

On site, the communities organise themselves: a first cooperative of 1,200 beekeepers was created a few years ago. Beekeepers place their hives in the forests and contribute to forest protection as honey and beeswax products represent a significant share of their income. Since 2013, Oku white honey has even been benefiting from Protected Geographical Indication (PGI).

Committed partners

The NGO CAMGEW has been working with beekeepers since 2012, organizing and training them on honey and wax production. Its goal is to protect Kilum Ijim forests as a whole by developing beekeeping. Thanks to its support, the Oku cooperative already produces about forty tons of honey per year in the zone, out of which about ten tons are labelled with the PGI "Oku white honey".

CAMGEW also educates villagers to preserve the forest and planted nearly 20,000 melliferous trees to regenerate the sensitive areas in the forests. The flagship species is *Prunus africana*, which used to be plentiful in the Oku forest in the past but whose bark has been overexploited for pharmaceutical uses. Its exploitation is currently banned but this species loved by bees is of very high economic potential.

The project and the prospects for change

The project aims to support farmers in 25 villages to develop economic sub-sectors that are favourable to biodiversity conservation.

By organising and supporting beekeepers to create four new cooperatives able to produce quality honey and wax, and by better marketing these products (on national, regional or international markets), it is expected to increase the income of the local communities and thus offer them more incentives to protect the forest.

Activities planned include:

- training of beekeepers in the relevant villages on improved production techniques;
- structuring of cooperatives and provision of initial working capital;
- supply of production equipment;
- establishment of a business strategy and identification of outlets;
- development of guidelines for proper management of production areas;
- enriching the forest by planting melliferous species.

The setting up of cooperatives and the opening of two outlets (in Bamenda and Yaounde) should allow for producing and marketing five tons of honey.

Regarding wax, the goal is to improve production and its promotion on the domestic market. Trial sales on the international cosmetics market will also be conducted in connection with Man & Nature.

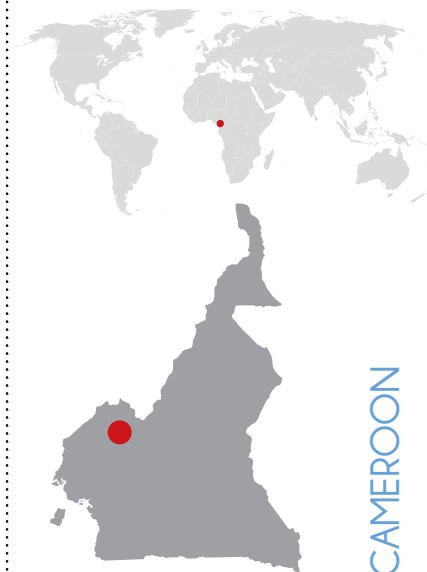
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Total cost : **98,800 euros**

Duration : **3 years**

Annual net cost after tax deduction* :
13,174 euros



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* on French paid taxes

